

Why Stories Matter

The art and craft of social change.

by Marshall Ganz

Sojourners, March 2009, pp. 16-21

I grew up in Bakersfield, California, where my father was a rabbi and my mother was a teacher. I went to Harvard in 1960, in part because it was about as far as I could get from Bakersfield, which was the terminus of the dust bowl migration that John Steinbeck made famous in *The Grapes of Wrath*.

I got my real education, however, when I left Harvard to work in the civil rights movement in Mississippi. I went to Mississippi because, among other things, my father had served as an Army chaplain in Germany right after World War II. His work was with Holocaust survivors, and as a child the Holocaust became a reality in our home. The Holocaust was interpreted to me as a consequence of racism, that racism is an evil, that racism kills. I made a choice to go to Mississippi.

recognize that we were all slaves in Egypt and in our time that same struggle from slavery to freedom is always going on, that you have to choose where you stand in that. The civil rights movement was clearly about that struggle. It was in Mississippi that I learned to be an organizer and about movement-building.

particular about young people, not just that they have time. Walter Brueggemann writes in *The Prophetic Imagination* about the two elements of prophetic vision. One is criticality, recognition

with the unexpected.

their crises. We learn to overcome them, and because of that we have lessons to teach. In a sense, all of us walk around with a text from which to teach, the text of our own lives.

experiences and values do we share as a community that call us to what we are called to? What is it about our experience of faith, public life, the pain of the world, and the hopefulness of the

us there because
traditions are grand stories of *us*. They teach how to be an *us*.

the fierce urgency of now. The story of now is realizing, after the sharing of values and aspirations, that the world out there is not as it ought to be. Instead, it is

One way to look at leadership is reaching down to mobilize the resources of a constituency and

We start with the skill of relationship-building, the story of self. Then we develop the skill of motivation or the story of us. Third, the skill of strategizing, the story of now. And fourth, the skill of action.

ride a bicycle. You can read 10 books about it or listen to someone lecture about it all day, but how do

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